

31 May 2024

To whom it may concern,

Re: Draft Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) for Consultation.

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide input in the development of Jobs and Skills Australia's Draft Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL).

Fruit Growers Tasmania is the state industry association representing growers from the berry, cherry, apple, pear and stone fruit sectors in Tasmania. Together these businesses have a combined farm gate value in excess of \$400 million per annum and directly employ some 1,500 people in ongoing roles, and over 8,000 people in seasonal roles during the peak of the harvest season.

Following consultation with our industry members, Fruit Growers Tasmania requests the inclusion of the following occupations for inclusion on the Draft Core Skills Occupation List.

Production specialist occupations:

- 234115 - Agronomist
- 121699 - Horticultural Supervisor or Specialist
- 362712 - Irrigation Technician
- 362411 - Nurseryperson
- 311314 - Primary Products Quality Assurance Officer
- 321212 - Diesel Motor Mechanic

Business leadership roles

- 111111 - Chief Executive or Managing Director
- 111211 - Corporate General Manager
- 121612 - Fruit Grower
- 121699 - Horticultural Crop Grower
- 121614 - Production Nursery Grower

Agricultural professionals.

- 233912 - Agricultural Engineer
- 234111 - Agricultural Consultant
- 234114 - Agricultural Research Scientist
- 234115 - Agronomic advisor
- 311112 - Agricultural and Agritech Technician
- 311115 - Irrigation Designer

These occupations are critical to the ongoing productivity and profitability of Australia's horticultural industry and Tasmania's agriculture-driven economy.

Yours sincerely,



Fruit Growers Tasmania

Basis for support

It is a fact widely acknowledged that agriculture in Australia is experiencing an acute skills shortage. The severity of skills shortages within the industry has been recognised in numerous industry communications¹, government surveys and statistics², government inquiries³, and is well documented in recent academic literature⁴⁵⁶⁷⁸.

In this environment, growers recruiting for skilled occupations struggle to find any suitably qualified applicants. These shortages are now widespread, across all production specialist and business leadership roles.

In Tasmania, skills shortages have been exacerbated by high levels of growth within Tasmania's horticultural sector. This growth has primarily driven by the increased investment and rapid growth of the state's berry sector, which has expanded to become one of the state's largest primary industries⁹.

Expansion at this rate has exacerbated existing skills shortages within Tasmania's horticultural sector to critical levels, and many employers are reporting an inability to fill skilled roles. A recent survey (2024) undertaken by Berries Australia noted 91% of industry respondents from Tasmania have been unable to fill one or more skilled roles with candidates already within Australia, and are considering international recruitment options to address this skills shortage. A breakdown of the roles businesses report they have been unable to fill is provided below¹⁰:

• Fruit Grower	47.6%
• Production Nursery Grower	38.1%
• Horticultural Crop Growers	61.9%
• Quality Assurance Manager	47.6%
• Agricultural Consultant	28.6%
• Agronomist	66.7%
• Agricultural and Agritech Technician	42.9%
• Motor Mechanic (General)	23.8%
• Small Engine Mechanic	23.8%
• Arborist	9.5%
• Irrigation Technician	85.7%

¹ <https://agrifutures.com.au/news/overcoming-the-agriculture-sector-skills-shortage/>

² <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/agricultural-workforce/labour-use/2022#summary>

³ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-agricultural-workforce-strategy.pdf>

⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Maja-Zaloznik/publication/239923723_Staff_shortages_and_immigration_in_agriculture/links/54733f2b0cf2d67fc0360c73/Staff-shortages-and-immigration-in-agriculture.pdf

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0743016721001236>

⁶ https://acda.edu.au/resources/FPJ_Winter_2022_Pratley.et.al-DRAFT.pdf

⁷ <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-01/apo-nid233856.pdf>

⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Wen-Wu-24/publication/355770042_THE_FUTURE_OF_AUSTRALIA'S_AGRICULTURAL_WORKFORCE_Report_prepared_by_Australia's_Innovation_Catalyst_CITATION_COPYRIGHT_AND_DISCLAIMER/links/617cb3173c987366c3037855/THE-FUTURE-OF-AUSTRALIAS-AGRICULTURAL-WORKFORCE-Report-prepared-by-Australias-Innovation-Catalyst-CITATION-COPYRIGHT-AND-DISCLAIMER.pdf

⁹ <https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/Tasmanian%20Agri-Food%20SCORECARD%202020-21.PDF>; page 28

¹⁰ Survey results courtesy of Berries Australia. Survey details available in their survey.

- Horticultural Supervisor or Specialist 71.4%

Employer demand outstrips the supply of suitable applicants.

Studies show demand for graduates with qualifications in the agricultural sector has consistently exceeded 5,000 positions since 2016,¹¹ and this figure only continues to grow as the industry continues to expand, specialise and professionalise.

Over the same period, Australia's ability to produce agriculturally-qualified personnel has been limited to approximately 900 per annum¹². For employers, this means 5 in 6 positions are unable to attract candidates with the relevant training to learn and undertake these specialist roles.

Training people to undertake these roles takes years.

Many of the skilled roles we have proposed for inclusion on the Core Skills Occupation List require a high degree of specialist tertiary training, and increasingly require relevant university-provided training to undertake. This training requires 3-4 years of full-time study to complete, and aims to make graduates ready to undertake occupation-specific specialist training, rather than being "job ready" at the time of graduation. Employers then take on the role of providing the occupation-specific training and experience.

This means the process to being someone into the industry and provide training experience to undertake specialist roles is often 5-7 years.

Knowledge and experience transferability may be limited.

One of the challenges experienced within horticulture is that skills and experience are often non-transferable between crops.

Horticulture is highly diverse, and the crop-specific knowledge and skills required to optimally manage the agronomy, irrigation, management and harvesting of fruit trees is very different from strawberry plants, root vegetables, salad greens, nursery plants, ornamentals or sports turf.

For employers, this means the skills and experiences candidates have built up in one area of horticulture may not be transferable and relevant to the crops grown within their business, further limiting the availability of suitable applicants.

Including Production Specialist occupations listed above on the Core Skills Occupation List will enable employers and industry to fill in-demand specialist roles in a timely manner, rather than investing years in the hopes that these occupations can be filled internally.

It will also support persons with training and experience in these much-needed areas to apply to migrate to Australia through independent or sponsored pathways.

¹¹ https://acda.edu.au/resources/FPJ_Winter_2022_Prattley.et.al-DRAFT.pdf

¹² [Ibid.](#)

There is no domestic training pipeline for business leadership roles in horticulture.

Currently there is no recognised formal training pathway in Australia which provides the wide combination of technical, financial and managerial skills which are increasingly required for senior leadership roles including Fruit Growers, Horticultural Crop Growers, Production Nursery Growers and Corporate General Managers with experience in horticulture.

Industry members often report being unable to find applicants with this combination of skills, as they typically take decades for candidates to develop.

Inclusion of the Business Leadership occupations listed above on the Core Skills Occupation List will allow employers to consider a wider pool of applicants when trying to find candidates with skills and experience relevant to their business and bring in in such expertise if it cannot be sourced within Australia.

The increasing specialisation and professionalisation of agriculture means growers increasingly rely on agricultural professionals for specialist skills/knowledge.

Australia's horticultural producers are responding to an increasingly complex and competitive environment by seeking external professional services¹³.

Agricultural professionals provide services to large producer networks, where they support them to adapt and respond to technologies, production practices, and financial risk management strategies, as well as guidance on how to navigate a changing and increasingly complex regulatory environment.

Agricultural professionals are increasingly become the primary source of advice for producers¹⁴, and continued access to agricultural professionals with relevant skills and experience in these areas is critical to supporting the long-term sustainability of the horticultural industry as it adapts to ongoing financial, technological, environmental, and social changes.

Inclusion of the Agricultural Professional occupations listed above on the Core Skills Occupation List will allow employers to bringing in critical expertise in new and emerging areas and make knowledge this accessible to agricultural producers.

Conclusion

The key benefit of having a strong skilled migrant program within Australia is that it allows employers to bring in suitably qualified individuals to be brought to Australia to take up urgent skilled job vacancies we cannot fill.

We are requesting that each of the occupations listed above be urgently included on the Core Skills Occupation List.

The occupations we have listed above are experiencing extreme skills shortages, leaving

¹³ <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/285016/>

¹⁴ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-agricultural-workforce-strategy.pdf>; page 73

employers unable to find people able to do this role.

This reflects the enormous and urgent demand for people with these skills, the slow time in training new persons, and the increasingly inadequate supply of suitably trained personnel able to take up this growing number of skilled roles.

